

## **How can I get a traffic signal installed at my intersection?**

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The question assumes a traffic signal will ‘fix’ a problem! That may be true, but the County Engineer needs to look at a number of points.

First, a traffic engineer must look at the traffic. How many and what kind of vehicles and pedestrians are using it? Are there hills and curves that will affect how well it works? Are there plans to rebuild the road in the area? What is the accident history? Also, how close are other signals?

Signals can greatly reduce injury or fatal crashes. They also can add to fender benders from rear-end hits. Normally, an increase in less hazardous rear-end accident is a good trade off for fewer more severe side accidents. But, when serious accidents are not happening at an intersection, and traffic control isn’t needed, there is little or no safety benefit. Installing a signal can in fact make the safety at the intersection worse.

Then, traffic signals cost more than most people think. A modern signal system at one intersection easily costs \$250,000 to a half million dollars. Sometimes the price is even higher because roadwork needs to be done so it works right. That buys the traffic signal gear and puts it all in place. Maintaining it costs about \$3,000 to \$4,000 a year.

Then of course, it may depend on who is responsible for the intersection. It might be at a county road and state highway, or a county road and city street. Often a shared responsibility needs to be worked out.

Finally, let’s say that is all of that is done, and it’s clear that a signal will help. It will now depend on available dollars and priority. When one is needed, it is common that others are needed. This is especially true in our growing suburban areas. Budgets usually just aren’t big enough to do them all at once. The County will need to decide which ones to do, and when the funds will be available.

I recommend that you work with your County Engineering staff to let them know of your concerns. And please, try to be a bit patient while they try to figure all of this out.

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Questions about this article, or any of the series, or on other topics related to County Roads, may be directed either to your County Engineer, or to Al King, P.E., County Road Administration Board, Olympia, at [Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov](mailto:Al@CRAB.Wa.Gov).